

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**ROBERT W.  
STRAYER:**

Chapter 7 is about the importance of trade in world history. Commerce has consequences. That is a central theme of chapter 7. It deals with a long distance trade during the era of third wave civilizations, between about 500 and 1500.

Traders, of course, carried more than goods in the saddle bags of their camels or the holds of their ships. They also carried religions. It was trade along the famous Silk Roads of Northern Asia that brought Buddhism from India to Central Asia and China. It was trade across the Sahara Desert that brought Islam to West Africa. Traders also carried diseases to distant places, most famously in the plague or the Black Death that originated in China and spread quickly across Eurasia to Europe and North Africa.

But the absence of trade also had consequences. Because the Americas were almost entirely isolated from the Eastern Hemisphere before Columbus, they lacked immunity to Old World diseases. And they died in appalling numbers when they encountered Africans and Europeans and their germs.

Commerce also registered in the realm of politics and society. The wealth available from controlling and taxing trade motivated the creation of states in Mesoamerica, Russia, East Africa, and Southeast Asia. And it sustained those states once they had been constructed.

Trade gave rise to a separate class of merchant communities in many civilizations. Elite groups frequently distinguished themselves from commoners by acquiring prestigious goods from far away, silk, tortoise shell, jade, rhinoceros horn, or particular feathers.

As you notice the consequences of commerce around the world during the third wave era, you might also consider how those economic relationships across great distances compare with those in our own time. Are we living, economically speaking, in a wholly different world or are there similarities that link our experience of globalization with that of people who lived a thousand years ago?